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Case Against Cuba

The solemn judgment against Cuba handed down by a committee of the Organization of American States has one enormous virtue. It comes at a fortuitous moment when there is an increasing European tendency to shrug off Castro as a neurotic U.S. obsession—a tendency, it should be added, that fumbling diplomacy here has helped to abet. The OAS report makes it clear that Cuban subversion is not an empty fantasy, and that concern about Castro is not confined to the United States.

The record should underscore what is involved. Four influential Latin American countries (Uruguay, Argentina, Costa Rica and Colombia) have joined with the United States in confirming charges that Cuba did indeed train guerrillas and ship arms with the purpose of overthrowing the elected government of Venezuela.

European skeptics may well dismiss the charge, pointing out that the CIA also engaged in similar activities at the time of the Bay of Pigs. Yet it should be noted that the U.S.-backed effort, no matter how ineptly handled, was aimed at the restoration of democratic self-government in Cuba. It is one thing to say that Cuban invasion was wrong in conception and execution, but quite another to excuse subversion practiced by a totalitarian dictatorship by equating it with support for pro-democratic Cuban exiles. Indeed, those who condemned the United States for its violation of international law are hardly in a position to wink away Cuban violation of exactly the same principle.

What is involved in Venezuela, let it be stressed, was not outside help to oppressed opponents of a brutal despotism. Rather, it was outside help to terrorists whose chief aim was to destroy democracy in order to create the proper climate for guerrilla warfare. That effort failed, and a freely-elected and progressively-minded government remains in firm control of Venezuela.

Paradoxically, some countries—notably Brazil and Mexico—are using the fact of failure to justify inaction by the OAS. The terrorists were defeated, they say in effect, so why not forget about the whole thing? This is very much like excusing an attempted murder on the ground that the assassin had poor aim. Indeed, the same two countries *did* break relations with the Dominican Republic when it was demonstrated that the Trujillo dictatorship plotted an attempt to murder President Betancourt of Venezuela.

It is not yet clear what the OAS will do about the finding against Cuba. Certainly the United States ought to move carefully and avoid at all costs any showdown vote that would break the OAS. The OAS judgment provides an opportunity for some badly-needed U.S. leadership in explaining that the dispute over Cuba does not involve the shipment of British buses to Havana—but instead the shipment of Belgian guns to Venezuela. Presented with force and maturity, this argument might help to shape a consensus that even Brazil and Mexico could support.